

PHYSICAL FRUIT, OR SPIRITUAL?

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shlach

Physical Fruit, or Spiritual?

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Today's Learning:
Nach: Tehilim 101-102
Mishnah: Nega'im 5:4-5
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nedarim 20
Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 607:4-6

In this week's parashah we read of the incident of the spies, as a result of which the generation of the Exodus was sentenced to die in the desert rather than enter Eretz Yisrael.

Yet it appears that Bnei Yisrael repented (see 14:39-40). Why did Hashem not accept their repentance?

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1747-1805; the Dubno Maggid) explains with a parable: A certain lower-class person became wealthy. He had a daughter, and a matchmaker proposed two prospective grooms for her--one boy, rich but with a bad reputation; the other boy, poor, but the son of the local rabbi. The girl's father said, "I would rather take the poor son of the rabbi, but at least let the rabbi buy his son a proper suit for the wedding."

The rabbi said that he could not meet this condition. "If he wants to make a match with me, it will be with no preconditions or dowry." The girl's relatives implored her father to accept the rabbi's son anyway, and he relented.

The rabbi, however, said, "I regret discussing a match with you. At first, I thought that you wanted a match with someone from a good family and that you valued Torah scholars. But, now that I see that, for materialistic things, you would have taken just anybody, I cannot make a match with you. Since you don't appreciate the value of a Torah scholar, what common ground do we have?!"

Similarly, says the Dubno Maggid, a generation that could say that it was better off in Egypt simply was not compatible with Eretz Yisrael. Apparently, all they ever wanted was its fruits, not its spiritual riches. (Mishlei Yaakov)

"But the men who had ascended with him said, 'We cannot ascend to that people for it is stronger mimenu / than us!'" (13:31)

As translated above, the word "mimenu" can mean "than us." Rashi cites the Gemara (Sotah 35a) which interprets "mimenu" as "than Him." Rashi writes, "If one could say such a blasphemous thing – the spies asserted that even G-d could not defeat the inhabitants of the land!"

R' Eliyahu Kitov z"l (1912-1976; best known for his Sefer Ha'todaah) explains this statement in light of the spies' own feelings of inferiority. [See next dvar Torah]. They reasoned: The midrash says that, before the Exodus, there was a debate in Heaven whether Bnei Yisrael were worthy of being redeemed. Again, before the Yam Suf was split, there was a debate in Heaven whether Bnei Yisrael deserved to be saved. Since we are unworthy, how many times can the Attribute of Mercy save us by the skin of our teeth? (Sefer Ha'parshiyot Vol.VII, p. 331)

"The land through which we have passed, to spy it out, is a land which devours its inhabitants." (13:32)

R' Meir Leibush Malbim z"l (19th century) writes: The spies told the truth, they just did not understand what they had seen. The fact that Eretz Yisrael appeared to be devouring the Seven Nations is a sign of the Land's holiness. Eretz Yisrael was created for Bnei Yisrael, and only for Bnei Yisrael. (Eretz Chemdah)

"There we saw the Nephilim, the sons of the giant from among the Nephilim; we were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes!" (13:33)

The midrash states: G-d said, "I am willing to forgive the spies for saying, 'We were like grasshoppers in our eyes.' However, I do not forgive them for saying, 'So we were in their eyes.' Do they have any idea what I did for them? Who is to say that I did not cause the Nephilim to view the spies as angels!"

R' Alter Chanoch Henocho Hakohen Leibowitz z"l (1917-2008; Rosh Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva in New York) explains: There were two sins contained in the spies' words: First, that they viewed themselves as puny grasshoppers, and second, that they assumed that the inhabitants of Canaan viewed them the same way. These two sins, while similar at first glance, had different roots. One sin was a failure of "da'at" / use of intellect, while the other sin was a failure of "hargashat ha'lev" / feeling. More specifically, the spies failed to use their intellect to recognize Hashem's power and greatness and to appreciate that Hashem can instill fear of the spies in the minds of the giants' offspring. And, they failed to use their hearts to feel that they were in G-d's protective embrace. A person can have emunah, i.e., he can know that Hashem is all powerful, yet he may still live on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Only a person who feels Hashem's closeness to him will experience the peace of mind which is the hallmark of a boteach Ba'Hashem / one who trusts in G-d.

R' Leibowitz concludes: One should be aware that there often is a great gulf between man's mind and his heart. This is why knowledge so often does not translate into action. The purpose of the study of mussar is to build a bridge across that gulf. (Chiddushei Ha'lev)

"It shall constitute tzitzit for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." (15:39)

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir Yeshiva in Poland; died 1936) teaches:

When one studies the section of the Torah discussing the mitzvah of tzitzit, one should picture in his mind two paths. One path leads to a city that is entirely Jewish; the other to a city that is entirely non-Jewish. [R' Levovitz gives as examples--Tel Aviv, on the one hand, and Shechem or Bet Lechem, on the other hand.] The differences between two such cities are stark, even more so if we could imagine that each inhabitant of Tel Aviv was a miniature Chafetz Chaim. One who wanders the streets of the Jewish city does not need to ask passers-by if they are Jewish. Likewise, one who wanders the streets of an Arab town will have no doubt that the people he meets are Arabs.

Were we up to par, the difference between holiness and impurity would be as stark. Then, one who was engaged in matters of holiness would never be distracted by impurity. However, those are not the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Indeed, how different are we really from our gentile neighbors? We pray in our own way, and they pray in their own way, but we all pray! We perform

acts of chessed / kindness towards our neighbors, and they perform acts of kindness towards their neighbors! (R' Levovitz adds: Woe to us if we need to be dependent on their kindness!) How then are we to stand out? How then do we make our prayer and our chessed expressions of holiness rather than merely acts that all civilized humans perform?

R' Levovitz explains: This is where tzitzit play such an important role. Our Sages say that the mitzvah of tzitzit is equal to all of the other mitzvot combined. This is because, as the verse says, it reminds us of all of the other mitzvot. The tzitzit garment literally surrounds its wearer. The word "tzitzit" shares a root with the word "tzitz," as in the verse (Shir Ha'shirim 2:9), "maitzitz / peering through the lattices." Tzitzit can cause the one who wears them to focus his sights, thus bringing him to live a life that is holy, not just a life that is civilized. (Da'at Torah)

The Fruits of Eretz Yisrael

The following is a letter from R' Pinchas Menachem Alter z"l (1926-1996) to his mechutan, R' Menashe Klein z"l (1924-2011). R' Klein was a prominent posek / halachic authority in Brooklyn, New York, and author of numerous sefarim. He also established the Yerushalayim neighborhood Ramot Ungvar. R' Alter was rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Sfas Emes in Yerushalayim and, for the last four years of his life, was the Gerrer Rebbe.

To the honorable one, my beloved friend and mechutan, the famous gaon and tzaddik, etc., wise and knowledgeable, R' Menashe Klein shlita, rabbi of Ungvar and head of Yeshivat Bet She'arim:

After inquiring of the well-being of his honor with true friendship and proper respect . . .

In order not to have, G-d forbid, two [consecutive] letters that do not contain divrei Torah, I will write something. Although I have many observations regarding your precious sefarim, Mishneh Halachot, I will write a small comment regarding a question asked by my brother, the [Gerrer] Rebbe, shlita. In the blessing known as Me'ain Shalosh [also known as Berachah Acharonah or Al Ha'michyah] we say, "B'kedushah u'v'taharah" / "with holiness and purity." [This blessing is supposed to be an abridgement of Birkat Hamazon, but] where is there any reference in Birkat Hamazon to kedushah and taharah? Now, you have written that the fruits of Eretz Yisrael are holy and must be guarded in purity. [Thus, since this blessing is recited over the Seven Species with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed, it makes sense to say, "B'kedushah u'v'taharah."]

I would like to add support for your answer. The mishnah at the end of Sotah (48a) states: "When the Temple was destroyed, fruits lost their taste. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, '[The absence of] purity removed the taste.'" Thus, when we pray [in this blessing] for the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash, we pray as well for the restoration of the good taste of the fruit, which requires the restoration of ritual purity. Thus we say, "B'kedushah u'v'taharah." May we merit this soon in our day.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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